

## Open Letter to Staff and Students of the University

Dear colleagues and students,

Many of you are probably very concerned about the restructuring of academic departments and programmes at the University, which has been extensively covered in the newspapers recently. I am writing this letter to give you a more comprehensive picture, as some of the reports in the newspapers are incomplete and contain a lot of inaccuracies. Media reports must have been based on the information leaked from the many consultation sessions held on the restructuring proposals. While we cannot say they are spinning stories, these reports obviously fail to grasp the underlying philosophy of the whole exercise or its salient features. Indeed all salient features of the restructuring plan are still proposals undergoing the process of consultation. They need the stamp of the Senate to become formal.

**[1]** As the Hong Kong government anticipates a huge fiscal deficit of over \$70 billion, all government bureaux and related organizations have to face such a reality and shoulder the burden of budget cuts. Universities as members of a major sector of the community cannot and should not evade their share of responsibility. Many rounds of discussions have thus been held by the government and the UGC with the universities to address the issue of funding cuts. The eight universities have also accepted with some reluctance a 10 per cent reduction in UGC subvention for 2004–5. Here I would like to add that the Financial Secretary has announced an 11 per cent cut over the next five years in resource allocation to all government bureaux (with the exception of the vote for education, which will be reduced by less than 11 per cent). We have every reason therefore to expect that there should be no further cuts for the universities in the 2005–8 triennium.

If we also take into account the salary reduction (3+3 per cent) to be implemented in line with the civil service pay cut, the University will be faced with a budget shortfall of \$384 million in 2004–5, representing an overall funding reduction of 12.3 per cent over 2003–4. Such a staggering figure calls for strategic handling on the part of University management, who intends to cope by (1) phasing in the reduction (over two to three years) to cushion the blow to various University units, and using reserves and donations to meet the estimated shortfall of some \$200 million in the first two years; (2) reducing first and foremost allocations to centrally administered funds; and (3) requiring teaching and non-teaching units to share proportionately the same burden. Based on these principles, annual appropriations for teaching units (i.e. faculties and academic departments) will have to be reduced by some \$140 million.

**[2]** The University has seven faculties, 61 departments, and over 200 programmes. An across-the-board budget cut may be the least strenuous, but will certainly do the greatest harm. Why? Because it means individual departments will have to shoulder cuts much larger than the 4 per cent that is being proposed (to be spread out over three years in a 2-1-1 pattern). Such cuts will be too heavy a burden for the departments, considering they have already suffered a 10 per cent reduction in funding allocation over the last six years. And if really given such a scenario, layoffs will become inevitable in some units, resulting in long-term damage to the University's teaching and research capabilities. Small departments (such as Anthropology

and Japanese Studies) in particular will experience not only the loss of long-term competitiveness but also the pain of immediate layoffs. Academic restructuring is therefore not just an exercise to ease budgetary pressures but a strategic move to preserve the strength of the University.

What is more, the University has just entered its fifth decade. With or without budget cuts, it is time for us to conduct an overall review of our strengths and weaknesses. The formulation of a Ten-year Vision Statement and the UGC's affirmation of our role as a comprehensive research university also exhort us to reinvigorate ourselves for our mission ahead. In the proposed restructuring, therefore, we'll see the integration of some small departments to achieve synergy and enhance competitiveness. We'll see some undergraduate programmes with sufficient research capability being upgraded to become postgraduate programmes (e.g. materials science & engineering and physical education & sports science). We'll also see certain specialized programmes which are outgrowths or derivatives of one or more departments being reverted to their 'mother' departments (e.g. Internet engineering). All these measures are designed to realign resources and strengthen the competitiveness of departments and programmes. The fact is, similar merging and reorganization has never been lacking over the past 40 years at The Chinese University, and has propelled the University forward to what it is today. The current exercise is not unprecedented, neither will it be the last. The history of the University itself consists in series of innovative integrations and restructuring.

**[3]** In short, during the process of restructuring, let us not rivet our attention on those programmes and departments which are to be phased out. Let us also include in our gaze the many new units which will spring up — new departments such as Cultural and Religious Studies, Linguistics and Modern Languages, and new programmes such as MA in sport studies. Some other departments and programmes will be given a new lease of life with a new orientation after integration. All in all, the vitality of the University's academic departments and programmes will only be reinforced, and not weakened, after the restructuring. There will also be much more room to promote academic diversity in teaching and research through interdisciplinary integration.

I would also like to point out that any restructuring will have its own course to run, and will not affect students currently enrolled in specific departments and programmes. They shall be able to complete their studies as scheduled and earn the degrees they have set out to earn.

**[4]** Dear colleagues and students, whilst the challenge before us is severe and may prove painful, it has at the same time given us the opportunity for rigorous self-inspection and self-strengthening. I want to stress that for each and every proposal for restructuring, we will ask this question: Is it intellectually supportive? We will also follow it up with: Will it achieve any significant cost-savings? Only after we are satisfied with the answers to both questions will the proposal be put to the University Senate for consideration. I should point out specially that all proposals for academic restructuring have been the result of extensive consultation and thorough discussion

between the faculties/departments and University management, with the majority of these proposals being initiated by the faculties/departments themselves. The whole process involves scores of formal or informal meetings between senior management (including myself, the pro-vice-chancellors, and many other colleagues) and the faculty deans, department chairmen, directors of studies, and teachers and students of the relevant programmes/departments. I fully realize that as far as consultation is concerned, no amount of communication is ever 'sufficient' and no outcome ever 'perfect', irrespective of the numerous meetings held or the long hours spent over discussion. For this reason I am writing this letter, in the hope that you will appreciate the logic and rationale behind the proposed restructuring and give us the understanding we need for its implementation.

**[5]** I also want to put in a few words here about cost-saving measures proposed for the non-teaching units. Now both teaching and non-teaching units are constituent parts of the University's organic whole, and both are indispensable to our survival and development. What we hope to achieve through our proposal is to avoid large-scale layoffs. That is why a range of options to save costs on a voluntary basis have been put forward, and non-teaching units are allowed sufficient flexibility to manage their funding cut before staff separation schemes are introduced as a last resort. Over the past few months, University management has engaged in dialogue with CUSA and other staff associations on different occasions and in different forms. We have tried our best to consider all feasible proposals and counter-proposals. Before any plan is adopted as final, we will continue to consult and negotiate. We hope to strike the right balance between the interests of the University and those of the individuals working in it.

**[6]** I have to thank you, my dear colleagues and students, for your patience in reading through this very long letter. There are yet a few more words which I find difficult to withhold. This funding slash is unprecedented in the history of the University in terms of its magnitude and ferocity. When confronted with such a challenge, however, I am deeply moved to have found, from senior management to the individual department and non-teaching unit, many colleagues who manage to face the issue squarely, with a sense of commitment, and always with the interest of the University in their hearts. They have not only racked their brains for measures to preserve the University's strength in teaching and research, they have also striven their utmost to sustain its continuous development. I am utterly convinced that The Chinese University is a university on the rise. Its momentum for upward surge has found full expression in our collective response to the challenges posed by the impending budget cut. Let me thank you once again.

Yours sincerely,



Ambrose Y.C. King  
Vice-Chancellor

17th February 2004

## 校長致全校同仁、同學公開信

各位同仁、各位同學：

各位最近在報章上看到關於中大學系、課程重組的大幅報導，想必十分關心，所以我決定寫這封公開信，給大家一個較全面的報告。因為報章上有些報導是不完整的，而且有許多不正確的地方，而這些報導肯定是從大學的建議方案在多次諮詢過程中為媒體披露的，雖非捕風捉影，但顯然沒有能完全地了解中大學系／課程重組的背後理念和確切方案。這個方案現在還是諮詢中的建議，必須有教務會的決議才算定案。

### (一)

由於香港政府出現七百多億元的嚴峻財赤，政府及有關部門均需面對這個現實，共同承擔，大學作為香港一個主要界別的成員，不能也不應置身事外，此所以政府、大學教育資助委員會多次與各大學討論預算削減事宜，最後八大院校共識於2004/05年度削減百分之十撥款。在此，我要指出，財政司公佈政府有關各部門，未來五年財政削減定為11%（教育部門則會少於11%）。以此，我們強力期待05-08年度不會再有進一步的削減。

04-05年中大所面對的財赤，連同限隨公務員（3%+3%）的薪金削減，共為三億八千四百萬元（總共減幅實為12.3%，此包括非人事經費因通縮而減撥的款項等）。面對這樣的巨大削減，大學必須籌劃預算的回應策略，大學的基本思維是：（一）我們必須分階段（即兩至三年）來做，以減輕對大學各個單位的過大衝擊。第一、第二年所不敷之數（約二億元），則由儲備及捐款來填補。（二）大學中央行政應率先承擔財削。（三）大學的教學與非教學的單位應有同等比例的承擔。基於這個思維所提出的建議方案中，本校教學單位（學院與學系）每年需減款項約為一億四千萬。

### (二)

本校有七個學院，六十一個學系，二百餘個課程，如果我們採取「一刀切」的方法，雖然最省力，但是遺害太大，為什麼？第一，如果「一刀切」，則每個學系須承受的削減幅度勢必比建議方案只削減4%（而且分2-1-1三年執行）要大，這對於近六年來已有10%的削減的學系，負擔太重，不少學系將無可避免會裁減教師，此必然使中大整體的教研力量受到長遠性傷害。特別是，有些規模

較小的學系（如人類學系、日本研究學系），不止將因此減弱長遠的競爭力，並且立即會出現裁減教師的痛苦。因此，大學之所以進行學系／課程重組決不止是為應付財削的壓力，而是積極地為保存教研實力的策略。再說，中大成立四十年，正跨入第五個十年。不論有無財削，我們都必須作自我嚴格的檢視，「十年願景」的制定，教資會對中大「研究型綜合大學」定位的認同，正是為中大整裝自己，再上征程。因此在重組中，一些小規模學系將會整合，通過協同效應，增強競爭力。一些有足夠研究力的課程應提升為研究院課程（如材料科學與工程學課程及體育運動科學課程），而一些從本系或兩系衍生的專門化課程，則回歸到原有學系（如互聯網工程學課程），這些措施正所以為整合資源，強化學系／課程的競爭力。其實，四十年來，中大一直在重組創新中不斷發展，此中大之所以有今日的格局與成就。所以，這次重組的工作，不是第一次，也不會是最後一次。重組創新是中大發展的歷史的構成。

### (三)

總之，學系／課程之重組，希望大家不只看到有些課程停辦（要指出，建議中學系只是重組，並無學系被削，「殺」系的報導是誤解），同時應注意到有新學系（如文化與宗教研究學系、語言學與現代語言學系）與新課程（如MA in Sport Studies）的成立。有些學系／課程整合了，但卻有了新的定位與面貌。整體上說，中大的學系／課程的實力，經過重組，不是減弱了，而是增強了。「學術多元化」在教學與研究方面，通過跨學科整合將有更多合作的空間。

在這裡，我要指出，學系／課程的重組是有一定過程的，所有目前就讀的同學都會按原學系／課程的時間表畢業，不會因重組而受影響。

### (四)

各位同仁，各位同學，這次財削的挑戰是嚴峻而痛苦的，但它也同時給了我們一個嚴格自我檢視、自我強身的機會。我在此要強調一點，任何學系／課程的重組方案，我們必然會問：「這樣的方案在學術上是否有說服力？」其次，再問：「這樣的方案能否節省資源？」我們只有在滿足了這兩個問題後才會正式提出方案，呈交教務會議決。在

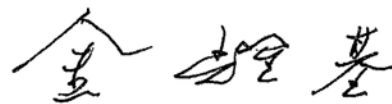
這裏，我還要特別說明一點。此次提出的學系／課程重組的建議，是經大學與學院／學系多番諮詢，反覆討論而達致的共識，其中大部份的最後建議且是由學院／學系自行提出；在整個過程中，我自己，副校長等許多同仁，與學院院長，學系主任，課程主任，及有關學系／課程的教師、學生，正式與非正式的會議總共不下數十次之多。我瞭解，在諮詢上，無論有多少場合，用了多少時間，溝通永遠是不會足夠的，也是不會圓滿的，也因此，我特別寫這封公開信給大家，希望有助於大家對大學提出的「學系／課程重組建議」的理解與諒解。

### (五)

在這裡，我也特別要對大學非教學單位的財削建議方案說幾句話。非教學單位與教學單位都是大學的有機組成，二者對大學的生存與發展都不可或缺。這次為回應財削，我們提出的建議方案，最主要的是希望避免大量的裁減人手，此所以大學在實施「離職計劃」之前，有多種自願節省開支的方法，可供各單位彈性處理。這個方案在過去幾個月中，大學與職員協會、職員、職工，在不同場合以不同方式多番諮詢，反覆會商，凡一切可行的建議、反建議，無不盡量一一接納！最後建議的方案未定之前，還會繼續諮詢、會商。我們希望最終大學與個人利益能夠找到最合理的平衡點。

### (六)

各位同仁，各位同學，謝謝大家有耐心看完我這封長信，最後我還要對大家說幾句我忍不住要說的話。此次財政削減之巨之猛，對中大言，是立校以來所未有，面對這樣的挑戰，我發現從大學管理層，到學院、學系，以及非教學單位，有那麼多同仁，都能面對現實，有承擔感，並刻刻以中大之利益為念，不止為保存中大之教研實力而籌思，更且為中大的持續發展而盡力。我非常清楚，而且相信，中大是一上升的大學，這上升的力量在這次財削之挑戰與回應中有著充分的表現。謝謝。



二零零四年二月十七日